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# "New Modernity, Transnational Women, and Spanish Cinema"

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**Maria Van Liew,**

**"New Modernity, Transnational Women, and Spanish Cinema"**

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**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010)**

**Thematic Issue *New Modernities and the "Third World"***

**Edited by Valerian DeSousa, Jennifer E. Henton, and Geetha Ramanathan**

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**Abstract:** In her article "New Modernity, Transnational Women, and Spanish Cinema" Maria Van Liew discusses aspects of migration to Spain in the context of histories of colonialism, racism, and sexism as represented in Spanish filmic narration. The flow of human traffic defies two aspects of European modernity: Non-linear time is reflected in the cycle of arrival/return/return as the nation relies on liminal subjects to determine its status as a progressive "First World" nation and in the effort to align representations of these cultural encounters accordingly, illusions of autochthonous national identity formations become dependent on practices of inclusion and, at times, cooptation of "the other" within. While "transnational subjects" are a fixture in most European films about immigration, the aesthetic result often remains intimately linked to the social and political structures of the host region/city/town, a landscape which, in turn, exhibits traces of its Eurocentric national "past." Van Liew explores the role of "First World" loneliness in receiving the "Third World" in Spanish immigration films such as Iciar Bollain's *Flores de otro mundo* (1999) and Fernando León de Aranoa's *Princesas* (2005). By emphasizing the particularities of arrival as experienced and determined by the various characters' levels of economic autonomy in conjunction with the pigment of their skin, Liew proposes a transnational reading of the inequalities, differences, and solidarities that arise from "new" arrivals indebted to globalization.

**Maria VAN LIEW**

### **New Modernity, Transnational Women, and Spanish Cinema**

As a self-proclaimed "European conscript," Stuart Hall offers the perspective of being "in but not of Europe," a vantage point that disputes Europe's claim to be somehow autochthonous and capable of producing itself from within (60). Hall explains that European identity, although premised on an imagined "sameness," is constructed through difference, thereby affirming the importance of what is, in fact, outside. Many contemporary Spanish films about immigration contribute to a critical inquiry of the power relations inherent within notions of cultural hybridity, the likes of which are often fueled by governmental and economic policies attempting to legislate and legitimate the return of Spain's historical relationship with its former colonial periphery, namely Latin America: "So nations — and supra-national communities — if they are to hang together, and construct a sense of belongingness amongst their members — cannot simply be political, economic or geographical entities; they also depend on how they are represented and imagined: they exist within, not outside, representation, the imaginary" (Hall 61). Shifting boundaries owing to the current re-zoning of European borders are becoming the recognizable norm that marks a generic fabric of cinematic representation as equally mutative in its inclusion of "non-European" protagonists who represent the arrival of "Third World" bodies to "First World" loci. The tendency of contemporary Spanish films about is to highlight the centrality of these bodies despite their liminal status to the (inter)national image of Spain. Hall maintains that "the lowering of barriers within Europe, the coming together around the "lingua franca" of a common market in goods, capital and ideas, the incorporation of a 'wider Europe' which the modern "myth" of the Euro is supposed to symbolize, each continues to display its reverse side. What is "open" within is increasingly barred without" (67). In the Spanish films about immigration under study here, Iciar Bollain's *Flores de otro mundo* (1999) and Fernando León de Aranoa's *Princesas* (2005), the "illegal" arrival of Caribbean protagonists shakes things up from the inside and forces "Spain" to re-imagine these encounters as "native" and "natural," thereby attaching the liminal qualities of immigration drama to practices of national identification as inclusive and modern.

While transnational subjects are a fixture in most European films about immigration, the aesthetic result often remains intimately linked to the social and political structures of the host region/city/town, a landscape which, in turn, exhibits traces of its Eurocentric national "past." Intriguing in these films is how "First World" loneliness prompts some Spaniards to identify with their Caribbean counterparts and to receive the "Third World" lovingly. Nonetheless, the inequalities, differences, and solidarities that arise from these "new" arrivals indebted to globalization offer a complex palette of reactions and expectations. The newness of these migrations to Spain, beginning in the 1980s with Spain's economic recovery — stirs up memories of older histories of colonialism, racism, and sexism, contemporaneous with the films' narrative structures comprised of disruptions in the traditional fabric of social and economic interaction. The flow of human traffic in this respect defies two aspects of European modernity: Non-linear time is reflected in the cycle of arrival/return/return (the latter once two homes have been established) as the nation relies on liminal subjects to determine its status as a progressive "First World" nation; and in the effort to align representations of these cultural encounters accordingly, illusions of autochthonous national identity formations become dependent on practices of inclusion and, at times, cooptation of "the other" within. Nearly a decade after Montxo Armendáriz's groundbreaking film *Las cartas de Alou* (1990), Bollain's contemporary tale of imported love offers insight into a global system that allows a wealthy European country to invite women from a geopolitical locus (the Caribbean) of postcolonial history intimately intertwined with its own. The transnational subjectivity exhibited in *Flores de otro mundo* is constructed out of an effort to merge Spain's social and economic reality of uneven domestic urban/rural development with the fantasy of the transformative powers of migration (see, e.g., Solé and Parella). The feminization of migration through female protagonists as desirable subjects helps depict the changing coordinates of the Spanish milieu in which romance plays a pivotal role in representing a shifting national landscape. This expansion allows us more opportunities to participate in critical practices commensurate with shifting identities heightened by the effects of globalization (see Martin-Marquez 269). However, it may be prudent to heed Simon Gikandi's sugges-

tion here that "there is no reason to suppose that the global flow in images has a homological connection to transformations in social and cultural relationships (632)" and to consider the level of (hopeful) fantasy involved in assessing the nonetheless socially and politically accurate circumstances and characterizations depicted in a film like *Flores*.

In the film the traditional aesthetic of (male) travel and mobility is challenged by the intractability of male characters in the fictitious small town of Santa Eulalia. Male insistence on female mobility is a strategy to repopulate the town and to combat a sense of abandonment by the "new" independence of working Spanish women (i.e., their exodus to metropolitan centers). This insistence relies, perhaps, on the liminal status of many Spanish arrivals as the "new" modern national aesthetic unfolds in interesting ways. This is a new space of reciprocity, a space of the shared responsibility required for transnational subjectivity to encompass the time and place of cultural encounter and hybridization that proves Spain to be modern, wealthy and among Europe's "big players." Mar Cebrian and Santiago López explain in their study of the "Spanish Miracle" that Spain finally escaped their designation as a "developing country," that is, their own liminal status, in the 1960s through economic development between 1960 and 1973, thus closing the gap with "advanced" countries, whose acceleration began before the 1950s. In this game of "catching-up," Spain had the highest rate of economic growth in the whole of Europe and among the member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Nonetheless, the internal landscape of Spain is still one of uneven development, with most growth taking place in urban centers, leaving the rural towns to fend for themselves.

Early in *Flores*, the director employs a long shot of an open landscape, whose stillness is accompanied by the tinkling of a cowbell and the sudden appearance of the white animal streaking across the screen "in search of greener pastures." Two black Caribbean women soon enter the scene and introduce themselves: "P: Did you arrive today [from your land]? M: Yes, this morning. P: And ... what do you think? M: [Looking around doubtfully] Is everything this ugly in summer? P: Like what? M: Well, everything! P: I'm not sure, I've not been here long. M: (smiling) I can tell." Taking the stick out of Patricia's hand, Milady gets the cow moving: "I have experience with this taking care of my grandfather." This joke evokes the conditions of Milady's existence on many levels. She is being "hosted" in Spain by Carmelo, a man almost thrice her age, whom she met through Cuba's sex tourism trade. Despite insinuations that she dominates him sexually, her "sponsor" holds all the cards in the form of "papers," and Milady must decide whether or not to marry him. Patricia, on the other hand, responsible for her two young black children from a failed marriage in the Dominican Republic, does not hesitate in committing to the forty-ish villager Damián, a situation she explains to Milady: "That's fine if you're white and the police don't stop you in the street, honey. But I spent four years going nuts with 'papeles'." This interaction between two Caribbean subjects (dis)located in the rural heartland of Castille, sets the tone of their supportive relationship despite their differing ages and goals. The combination of disparate yearnings for "greener pastures" and the romantic desires of Spanish nationals entails a tale of imported love from urban centers (Havana, Santo Domingo, Madrid, and Bilbao). Three tenuous relationships take shape in different ways. A wealthy middle-aged builder, Carmelo imports Milady (described as a "golddigger" on the DVD promotional sleeve), while the more mature, independent Patricia must contend with her two small children, her exhusband, and a meddlesome mother-in-law through marriage to the shy villager Damián. A third relationship forms between two older Spaniards, Alfonso and Marirrosi, a resident of Bilbao unwilling to "wed" herself to Spain's "heartland."

Bollaín, following the lead of newspaper accounts of the entrepreneurial spirit of the phenomenon of the "Love Bus" in Spain (see Fuchs), decided to focus on three women originating from different geopolitical locations, all marginal to the "central" position of the fictional Santa Eulalia and its "harsh" Castilian landscape. Milady's disappointment upon arrival is the question "Is everything this ugly?" and represents a disconnect between her expectations of a "First World" country, developed most likely through commercial media and the conspicuous consumption of foreign tourists in Cuba, from the reality of the uneven distribution of wealth domestically as well as internationally. Likewise, this inhospitable environment is an ode to the challenge this invitation poses for the local women, too, whose resistance and cynicism is expressed throughout the film. What the film promotes is a critical understanding of the contradictions inherent in its transnational subject matter as a global relationship with

the insider/outsider within. Rather than create a noticeably "Spanish" story with universal applications, *Flores* promotes the nation as an unavoidable referent destined to redefinition and transnational encounters. Spain already contains contradictions that are expanded to transnational dimensions by the borderless subject, specifically "organized" in the film as Caribbean and by historical association with Spain, postcolonial: "Increasingly, the internal relations of many countries will be shaped by the pressures brought about by the groups of those who do not belong fully anywhere, who move and reside between borders" (Navajas 2). Nonetheless, asymmetrical power relations, internal or external to the unavoidable national referent will continue to haunt us in our critical assessment of socially conscious films such as *Flores*. What we are investigating here is the tension within the transnational encounter between "feminine" mobility and patriarchal intransigence as one enabled by market strategies of globalization that increasingly invite "foreigners" to participate in local trade.

In the opening scene, the three protagonists speed along a winding road with a busload of women, reminiscent of a tour bus by the manner in which they gawk at the town and its inhabitants. These "tourists," however, are all potentially willing to migrate from urban environments where they are employed as housecleaners, nannies, janitors, and nurses, and to insert themselves into the established social structure of the town. The inclusion of Marirrosi, a divorced Spaniard living in Bilbao as a nurse and single mother of a teenage son, serves as an important point of contrast, since she is the wealthiest by comparison owing to her legal status as a "modern Spanish woman" who does not have to submit to a traditional sexual arrangement for financial security. This — actually Basque — resident has no intention of sacrificing her autonomy by moving to Santa Eulalia, much like the male characters. Like Carmelo she thinks "enough with these trips" yet is unable to import her man to a bustling northern city. Alfonso's intransigence is rampant among all male characters, secure in their ability to import love, most likely from the "Third World." The intransigent male villager remains determined in his liminal status as "desirable" within Spain, owing to uneven urban/rural developments, while seeking affirmation of his centrality outside of Spain. The film script exposes this attitude more notably in the local bar where bachelors of varying ages are planning the second round of "love bus" invitees. In Bollaín's and Llamazares's published script, the men debate improvements to the process: "Bachelor 1: This advertisement is so third world-ish, making us look desperate. Bachelor 4: Don't mess with an announcement that worked just fine last year. Bachelor 3: We could have a small bullfight as well as the dance, since bullfighters attract a lot of women" (174). While none of these lines are included in the film, their "old fashioned" sentiments are embodied by all of the male characters in their privilege of global intransigence. The attractiveness of rural Spanish residents to these women is premised on uneven global economic structures and changing social roles for men and women within Spain. This relationship of mutual need and disdain marks the advent of the modern age, as the bodies of these immigrants cause a sensation due to their difference as well as offering evidence that the periphery is within Spain's very heart(land).

Several studies of the film (see Ballesteros; Martínez-Carazo; Gavilán; Flesler) highlight uneven transnational developments that are represented through the paradox of desire for something that also poses a threat: "In this impossibility to reconcile their attraction as objects of desire and their rejection as a threat to the dominant system supports the film's social critique. The definitive installment of two Caribbeans in this rural locus ... opens to the exploration of xenophobia, racism, marginalization, in a sense to the "not belonging" to a society ready to erase the past but stammering at the moment of outlining the future (Martínez-Carazo 382). Isolina Ballesteros comments along these lines that "Reproducing a traditional rural lifestyle is shown as essential to the repopulation project and paradoxical, at the same time, when considering the globalized and highly technological status of the Spanish rural landscape" (7-8). As such, the depletion caused by these uneven modern developments has initiated a situation of miscegenation by invitation, and increasingly diverse cinematic explorations of the stories that unfold. But the liminal quality of the decisions that these "disruptive bodies" make, more often to remove one's self from the center in order to seek out a more independent (economic) situation, is apparent.

In *Flores* Milady's spectacular arrival with all its imperialist symbolism of displacement contributes to the notion that there is no dress code for the immigrant woman. While Patricia is conservative in her attire, easily blending in with this conservative landscape, Milady's bright form fitting "Italian ly-

cra" pants and platform sneakers and braless lycra top, inappropriate for the chilly overtones of this environment, over-determines her sexualized body to the point of parody. In a gesture to the "old" parameters of colonial relationship with this body, Milady's inappropriate dress insists on cultivating tactics of resisting representation from within the field of the same: "For if representation has already spoken for in the name of dominance, it is only appropriate that the diasporic subject should cultivate strategies and protocols of resistance to resist 'being had' by regimes of representation" (Radhakrishnan 3). Clad in red, white, and blue (representative of Cuban and U.S. nationalism simultaneously) — "What better site for disruption of the social order than the seeming scene of the origin of women's oppression?" (Gaines 9) — a chorus of old men, reminiscent of Spike Lee's hilarious Greek chorus of neighborhood denizens in *Do the Right Thing*, express their racial confusion and sexist reactions as she steps out of Carmelo's car: "Abuelo 1: Whoah! She's hot! Which one is she? Abuelo 2: The Cuban. Abuelo 3: Wasn't she Dominican? Abuelo 2: No! The Dominican is Damián's. Don't you get it!? Abuelo 1: Listen, I think this one is hotter than the other one. Abuelo 2: Yes, much better. Abuelo 3: What teeth! What lips! Abuelo 2: Wow, what kisses she must plant on him! If only.... Abuelo 1: Ah, to be thirty again!" This receiving party, seemingly innocuous owing to their advanced ages, nonetheless serves as precursor to racism and sexist violence that Milady, the darkest and youngest of this trio of displaced protagonists, will endure. Milady's sexual maturation is deployed to turn the body itself into an instrument of disruption that becomes disillusioned.

Milady soon cuts loose from Carmelo's conventional confines and hitchhikes to Valencia for a dose of disco, beach, and fantasy, saying to the truck driver who suggested the trip: "I live in Italy. I'm visiting a friend for the week." Imagining herself a tourist, rather than an immigrant, after her trip Milady returns to the harsh reality of physical attack, to Carmelo's brutal frustration who brands her face. Her subsequent docility and housebound status also quell her colorful wardrobe, which turns toward the tones of the host landscape: navy blue, brown, grey. What this turn implies is that Milady's arrival offers "the finality of representational and representative *hubris*" that R. Radhakrishnan warns against, since the "diasporic hybrid conjuncture" proposed by Carmelo's importation of her becomes the site of a paradox where (self) representation and political truth collide violently. Discursively, Milady's diasporic subjectivity remains autonomous, despite her vulnerability to the "real effects" of racism and sexism inflicted on her body, and resists the implied necessity of participating in diasporic hybridity (forming a family with Carmelo), thereby remaining liminal to the transnational subjectivity explored as possibility in the film. Milady's resistance also serves to emphasize the irony of Carmelo's advanced age and underscores the humiliation of his own abandonment caused by his own delusions of desirability in a "relationship" with "third world" poverty, thereby provoking a "new racism" stemming from older models of colonial subject/colonizer. This critical aspect is underscored by the inclusion of Marirrosi and her prerogative to abandon her "transnational relationship" (internal to Spain) and to return to her former life as a single working woman/mother in Bilbao. Her criticism of Santa Eulalia's ruralism as "too suffocating" is not available to immigrants like Patricia with children, more willing to submit themselves to geographic relocation for the sake of ensuring their legal status.

It takes Damián some time to stand up to his mother's racist reluctance to this "foreign invasion." Once installed in her new home, Patricia must negotiate her new status with the resentful Gregoria, a tiny craggy woman whose intentioned hostility collides with the open voluptuousness of Patricia and her friends and family visiting from Madrid. As a resentful matriarchal force who tries to invoke the Spanish "we" of the household, she attempts to censor and prohibit Patricia's tastes and customs: cooking beans with or without broth, sounds of love-making, and "foreign" visitations. Locked in a constant process of negotiation whereby mother and daughter-in-law vie over the domestic space, Gregoria's and Patricia's difficult relationship introduces the possibility of a transnational feminist reading of the need for negotiation between women in a heterogeneous and multi-faceted world on par with the complications implied in negotiations between societies and between nations. Gregoria's and Patricia's conflicts due to cohabitation demonstrate that changing borders are not always liberating, but potentially invasive and challenging. Gregoria insists on "her" rules until threatened by her son with abandonment, pushing her toward a new responsiveness to Patricia as a woman rather than as a threat (Camí-Vela, "Entrevista" 183). A touching scene in the cemetery where Gregoria cleans her husband's grave offers the possibility of reconciliation when these women speak of love for their hus-



bands by describing them as "respectful" and "good": "Patricia: Did you love him a lot? Gregoria: [turning from the stone with "Damián" written on it] He was a good man; treated me well. Patricia: [smiling] Just like Damián." Words cede to a *mise-en-scène* that allows them to bury prejudices and create a bond of mutual understanding, thereby eradicating the racist fears fueling Gregoria's resistance to change. The two women finally see each other, if only ephemerally, as equals: "Gregoria does not know who this woman is. And she doesn't want to know out of fear. This is one of the roots of racism: fear of the other and since I don't know her, well, I reject her... Suddenly, she sees her and realizes that nothing bad has happened, that she's a woman just like her" (Camí-Vela, "Flores" 241). Gregoria's softer stance as the political mother, representative of "una madre patria" who learns to embrace "la gran familia hispana" in a gesture of reconciliation is evocative of the maternal discourse of the unity of "the race" to the fraternity of Hispanic peoples, employed in the conciliatory discourse of 1950s Spanish films in an effort to promote their commercial viability to a larger market (Santaolalla 59). Along these lines, the scene needs to take place outside the claustrophobic confines of the home to gear their relationship towards solidarity as women rather than the antagonism promoted by the limitations of space "at home."

Marirrosi's melodramatic disappointment with Alfonso's intransigence is offset by the dramatic overtones of Patricia's ordeals with domestic resistance. Important to note is that Gregoria would be in the same situation as Alfonso or Carmelo, left alone in "her" house, had she not found a way to see Patricia as an ally in forging her family's future. The film, consistent with its sympathetic connection to the development of transnational subjectivity as premised on a shared responsibility, releases Milady from her position of abused but desirable object to face other possible arrangements lingering beyond the frame — deportation, another unequal loveless relationship, financial autonomy — continuing her migration in search of a location within Europe and "First World" capitalism. In this manner, Bollaín's contemporary tale of imported love offers a glimpse of a global system that allows a wealthy European country to invite "love" from a geo-political locus whose post-colonial history coincides with its own. This critical/celebratory focus is evocative of Fredric Jameson's re-envisioning of cinema as a complex "space" that engages the desires and concerns of the individual subject and provides them a window through which they can glimpse the social totality within which they, and the film itself, are embedded (283). In this sense, the geopolitical aesthetic of the "romantic" encounters depicted in *Flores* is at once a product of what Jameson views as the prevailing social "fact" of our time, late capitalism or, what many now call, globalization, while harboring simultaneously glimpses of the fantasy of harmony and reconciliation. The successes and failures of Santa Eulalia's (in)ability to absorb the three "foreign" imports unfold in a manner that resists celebration of Spain's status as a member of the European and, rather, "focuses on the hybrid temporalities that crowd the margins of this inclusion" (Martín-Cabrera 48). As Luis Martín-Cabrera suggests, the hierarchies of difference established in a modern European notion of time are "irrevocably entangled" in the insistent though flawed heterogeneity of Bollaín's film (48). Milady may be penniless, but she knows that her youth is a valuable commodity and she refuses to succumb to a "loveless match" in exchange for security, thereby posing a threat to the (global) status quo, whereas Patricia's marriage "repairs" and upholds Spanish patriarchy, however "gentle," in multicultural splendor.

While the film sets up the time and location as one of mutual need, all three relationships self-destruct. I argue that the real and virtual phenomena of globalization, surrounded by a rhetoric of newness, are eventually beset by the baggage of postcoloniality residing in this Castilian landscape, representative of the persistently retrograde aspects of Hispanic gender, class, and race relations. In other words, this (economically) wealthy nation-state, in spite of a "certain crisis of legitimacy," still demands affiliation (papers) from their citizens and subjects. Simon Gikandi offers the rather pessimistic realization that "while we live in a world defined by cultural and economic flows across formally entrenched national boundaries, the world continues to be divided, in stark terms, between its 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' sectors. It is precisely because of the starkness of this division that the discourse of globalization seems to be perpetually caught between two competing narratives, one of celebration, the other of crisis" (629). When Patricia tells Damián the truth about the extortionist practices of her exhusband and exclaims "Then you tell me where I get the resources to survive," he responds sadly, "through the wedding." In her frustration with her exhusband (an illegal immigrant) in

town, Patricia asks her new partner to help her live "honorably" and to look at her reality: "Do you really think I would have married you if I could have set up house, work and my kids on my own?" Disillusioned and angry, Damián expels Patricia and her children from his house, unable to face the truth of Patricia's question: "How do you think I got here?" This scene emphasizes the shared responsibility of realizing the enigma of arrival as one of importation, arrival by invitation, although the invitee might not understand the global ramifications of his role in the relationship. In a sense, the enigma is owing to ignorance of one's own complicity in the urgency of departures and arrivals in global context.

What I hope to have demonstrated is that neither the Spanish government nor the cultural effects of these encounters will wholly determine the characters' lives, but rather the power relations developing within a hybridized local family dynamic. And this is precisely the challenge for a feminist reading of *Flores*. As spectators we may be hesitant to celebrate the "escape" of two women from their displacement in/to isolated Santa Eulalia. Both refuse to adapt to the traditional rural modus operandi favoring their male patrons' desire for a migratory relationship, preferring the cosmopolitanism of Spain's coastal environments. On the other hand, the interracial marriage of a Dominican woman with two black children from a prior union helps to preserve the crumbling structures of patriarchal privilege locally while allowing its redefinition by their presence and, in this film, acceptance, as new national subjects. This is further reinforced by the cyclical return of the "Love Bus" one year later as children swarm the vehicle in renewed expectation.

To the chagrin of many critics of these final scenes of *Flores*, the film does not do enough to denounce the conservative overtones of the "success" of interracial marriage in a traditional context. This may suggest that the only way of breaking with Spanish traditions of exclusivity is through non-participation and by "constructing a transnational cultural space of reflection" (Navajas <<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v14/navajas.htm>>). But this position is one of cosmopolitan privilege, one which offers no real alternatives to the burgeoning reality of cooperation and compromise needed in the rural sector housing some of the most rigid and potentially violent attitudes towards cultural, ethnic and economic difference. Gikandi points out that transgressive theories of globalization reject the identity of the nation as 'the particular time and place and practice' that generates cultures as too Eurocentric in its sense of time (development) to be accurate for speaking of transnational diasporas (635). But *Flores* aligns itself with the insistence of the predominance of Eurocentric time as a material reality: "It is in this sense that the nation becomes both the form that structures modern identities and the sign of their displacement and alienation" (Gikandi 635). Confirming this assertion is the representation of dislocation by migration as a shared phenomenon in global context as the requirement of relocation for these invited women requires negotiation and adaptation on the part of the Spanish people as well, a scenario we shall see revisited and expanded to more intimate dimensions in *Princesas*.

It is precisely this disturbing sense of integration of "the other" into the Spanish social and economic fabric depicted in a social realist film like *Princesas* that enhances the sense of reciprocity necessary in depicting transnational subjectivity. In the twenty-first century especially, "the Latin American friend" has been offered many roles in Spanish film narratives. This process of normativization of friendship as secondary to individual protagonism is turned on its head by a story of friendship that ensues between two young women prostitutes despite numerous scenes of their victimization by male predatory customers. Aranoa explains: "I'm not interested in the girl, the prostitute who speaks to a car, but more so in when she turns around to speak to a friend. The dialogue is going to be very different" (*Princesas* DVD Special Features). In his film Aranoa picks up on Milady's liminal status and potential by presenting two protagonists who "choose" to live on the social margins as a means to saving money for their ultimate goals of happiness — a euphemism for overcoming their respective situations of solitude and marginality. Inadvertently, it is the solidarity of mutual fascination and respect that leads them to new choices, since their "official" membership in two different clubs, "First-World" and "Third-World" attempts to determine their respective fates. Cayetana, despite her central location and legal status as a national of the European Union, seems to suffer from a depressive inertia, while Zulema is driven to send money home to her mother and young son in the Dominican Republic despite her inability to legalize her status and earn an "honest" living. In many ways, the film



could have been titled, "When She Turns Around," because it is an exploration of friendship between a Dominican "irregular" and a Spanish national, whose families know nothing about their activities. Their sense of invisibility in this regard does not impede them from seeing and adopting characteristics of the other, most notably Cayetana, who has her hair braided in an "exotic" fashion and reports happily that she is getting more work as a result. Ultimately, despite initial rejection, the members of the hair salon integrate Zulema into the collaborative where we see her braiding other women's hair as well. It is this friendship of collaboration that is disrupted continuously by prejudice, hardship, abuse, violence, the two women's dreamy approach to reality and, ultimately, the HIV that Zulema discovers she suffers from towards the end of the film.

The enigma of the arrival of undocumented women is framed most acutely at the beginning of the film, when Cayetana's point of view is represented collectively from within the confines of a hair salon, whose large front window looks upon a plaza ablaze with "flowers from another world," a conglomerate comprised of numerous undocumented prostitutes of Latin American, Asian, and African origins. Rather than focusing on the male gaze, Aranoa offers a fearsome female gaze obsessed with these "exotic flowers." From within the salon one Spanish prostitute complains, "I'm working half as much since these people came to the neighborhood" to which the film's protagonist Cayetana responds, "Poor things, they have to earn a living somehow. Maybe there's no work in their countries," which in turn garners the cynical response: "What, don't people fuck in their countries?" Unlike her colleagues, the film's protagonist suffers from a certain fascination with Latin Americans and dreams of saving enough money to "get a pair of tits like them," noting that one of her friends is working a lot more since she had a similar operation. Yet, she notes the potential of "threat of self-rejection" ("peligro de auto-rechazo") when tampering with the body, which foreshadows the ending of the film. The salon conversation continues as Black women are visible from the shop window and the cynic states that "they are the worse. Since they arrived, it's like a jungle," referring, she says, to the lower prices they have to charge now: "It's not an issue of racism, but rather of economics." The conversation devolves into a dissection of the foreign women: *culos* (asses), ways of walking, smells, and hairdos. This shift to the female gaze is significant, because it demonstrates the Spanish woman's sense of displacement as sexual object within the dimension of Spanish social and economic interaction. It also reveals the uselessness of a transnational feminist theory that would act as if women's oppressions and empowerment are universal; that women do not experience and engage actively in power plays which are in part structured by intersections of nationality and race. The beginning of the centrality of friendship along lines of difference begins, in fact, as this sort of power play.

After a confrontation with the "competition" over a client, Cayetana finds that Zulema, her Dominican counterpart, has left her half of the sum earned as a gesture of solidarity and fairness, thereby setting in motion a friendship premised on the moment these women "turn around" and truly see each other, much like Gregoria and Patricia in the cemetery in *Flores*. While no one in Santa Eulalia can compare to the "disruptive difference" that Milady represents in an isolated rural milieu, the more claustrophobic depictions of the streets in *Princesas* insinuate that Zulema is just one of hundreds of thousands of women flocking to Spain's urban loci. Isabel Santaolalla ventures that the Caribbean woman now occupies a role in cinema (and beyond the screen) once granted the "Nordic woman" in the 1950s and 1960s in Spain when northern European tourism began arriving en masse to Spanish shores. She suggests that Spain, as a "First World" player can no longer perpetuate northern European women as icons of "difference," "otherness," and "exoticism": "One could venture that, even today, it is more comfortable for the Spanish man to direct his libidinous gaze outside, towards the foreign woman, avoiding in this way objectifying the Spanish woman who, after all, is mother, wife, or daughter deserving of respect" (180). Women's liberation in Spain also includes a sense of entitlement in objectifying both Spanish and "foreign" men as sexual objects or, in this case, as customers. Nonetheless, women need to "protect themselves," which Zulema does not do and as a result contracts a virus that prevents her from selling herself as exotic commodity. Symbolically, her body rejects the role ("auto-rechazo") and decides to return home.

The realization that they have to separate despite their solidarity wakes the two women up to their individual realities. In a touching scene in which Cayetana gives Zulema the hundreds of Euros she managed to save for "her operation," she states in her typically dreamy way that Zulema has left

an indelible imprint on her (on Spain): "Things aren't important because they exist, but because we think about them. Like your son. He's not here, but you think of him. That's why he exists. My mother always said that we exist because others think of us." Cayetana seems relieved to have made this connection with "the other," whose affection and vulnerability releases her from the "reality" of what she believes is her path — to improve her body and desirability based on other's dimensions, in favor of what she knows, that love and solidarity, in the form of Zulema, exists. Earlier in the film, Cayetana laments, "The worst thing wouldn't be to find out that there's nothing after death, but that there is another life like this one." The addendum to Zulema's departure is one of a transformed Cayetana, who having recognized "the other" within Europe and within herself, offers the audience a chance to entertain transnational subjectivity as a shared responsibility in overcoming our worst enemies — inertia and apathy, most notably when surrounded by possibility and privilege. Strangely, there is a sense of free will in Zulema's departure, underscored by Cayetana's bragging to airport guards that: "My friend has just left, but not because you forced her to, but because she wants to be with her family. Because she wants to. That's all."

While I have offered only a brief reading of this particular film, my point is to begin an exploration of "the other" as friend rather than mere object/subject of desire or rejection. I contend that it is Cayetana's and Zulema's relationship that represents the transnational, more so than Zulema's illegal presence as an individual. This aesthetic of liminality is enhanced even further by the film's structure, which highlights the space and place of globalization as a shared experience of evolving neighborhoods, hairdos, even customers. While many films about immigration in the 1990s deal with the paranoia surrounding a sense of loss of national identity fueling anti-immigrant sentiment, films like *Flores* and *Princesas* depict transnational relations as "the potential centre point for interracial negotiation," as well as "the locus of hope for a multi-ethnic and tolerant society" (Ballesteros 7). Likewise, both films avoid conflating woman and nation as mere image while nonetheless exploring transnational spaces of possibility prompted by the "disruption" of women immigrants in contemporary Spain. In an effort to avoid male-centered humanist forms of comparative (here/there, center/periphery) storytelling, these stories introduce the power relations inherent within notions of cultural hybridity fueled by governmental and economic policies attempting to legislate and legitimate the return of Spain's historical relationship with its former colonial periphery. This re-established relationship for many women and men requires the paradox of separation from the familiar and the familial for them to function — as family members and friends — in Spain.

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